

August 1, 2017

Dr. Matthew Coats, Program Manager
Office of University Programs
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, DC 20528-0217

Dear Dr. Coats:

Please let this letter serve as support for the proposal being set forth to establish to United States Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence for Cross Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV).

The proposal to establish such a Center of Excellence immediately on the United States -Mexico border will be very productive as it would involve researchers and collaborators from both sides of the border who know the issues very well; awarding the Center to UTRGV offers the unique benefit of accomplishing this advantage. In fact, a number of UTRGV faculty have collaborated with their Mexican counterparts on a number of occasions in the past. In many cases, there is already a significant amount of trust between the two countries who will be working to better understand and to address the threats to the movement of people and goods between Mexico and the United States.

I believe the expertise, resources, and location of UTRGV will converge to accomplish the mission of the Cross Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense Center of Excellence to research and develop solutions, protocols, and capabilities to support DHS operations that detect, assess, and respond to biological threats and hazards that could adversely impact the Nation.

Many of the innovative ideas to improve the screening of products coming from Mexico into the United States will require communication and collaboration between the United States and Mexico. (I.e. Mexican Customs and U.S. Customs). The researchers from the United States who are involved in this proposal are well known and respected on both sides of the Rio Grande River. The issues for which the Center of Excellence will recommend innovative solutions will certainly have positive implications regionally and nationally since the entire United States is dependent on healthy and safe products coming into the country from Mexico. We expect that this Center of Excellence will develop new and more efficient ways to improve quality testing of produce in a very timely manner, which is critical for the maintenance of the integrity of the U.S. food supply chain.

By including both Mexican and American graduate students in the proposed research, OHS and UTRGV will be preparing the future leaders in addressing these important cross-border issues. The OHS Center of Excellence at UTRGV will be an educational resource for governmental leaders as well as numerous professionals from both the public and private sectors for many years. I am confident that awarding the Center to UTRGV will be a tremendous benefit for both countries and am forwarding my full endorsement of their proposal to you.

Sincerely,

Ramon Garcia